



OSHA 3074

Hearing Conservation

Hearing Conservation

U.S. Department of Labor
Occupational Safety and Health Administration

OSHA 3074
1995 (Revised)

This informational booklet is intended to provide a generic, non-exhaustive overview of a particular standards related topic. This publication does not itself alter or determine compliance responsibilities, which are set forth in OSHA standards themselves, and the *Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970*. Moreover, because interpretations and enforcement policy may change over time, for additional guidance on OSHA compliance requirements, the reader should consult current administrative interpretations and decisions by the Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission and the courts.

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This information will be made available to sensory impaired individuals upon request.
Voice phone: (202) 219-8615;

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) message referral phone:
(800) 326-2577.

Hearing Conservation



U. S. Department of Labor
Robert B. Reich, Secretary

Occupational Safety and Health Administration
Joseph A. Dear, Assistant Secretary

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Abstract This informational booklet is intended to provide a generic, non-exhaustive overview of a particular standards related topic. This publication does not itself alter or determine compliance responsibilities, which are set forth in OSHA standards themselves, and the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970. Moreover, because interpretations and enforcement policy may change over time, for additional guidance on OSHA compliance requirements, the reader should consult current administrative interpretations and decisions by the Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission and the courts. Material contained in this publication is in the public domain and may be reproduced, fully or partially, without the permission of the Federal Government. Source credit is requested but not required.		
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Occupational Noise Exposure

Noise, or unwanted sound, is one of the most pervasive occupational health problems. It is a by-product of many industrial processes. Sound consists of pressure changes in a medium (usually air), caused by vibration or turbulence. These pressure changes produce waves emanating away from the turbulent or vibrating source. Exposure to high levels of noise causes hearing loss and may cause other harmful health effects as well. The extent of damage depends primarily on the intensity of the noise and the duration of the exposure. Noise-induced hearing loss can be temporary or permanent. Temporary hearing loss results from short term exposures to noise, with normal hearing returning after a period of rest. Generally, prolonged exposure to high noise levels over a period of time gradually causes permanent damage.

OSHA's hearing conservation program is designed to protect workers with significant occupational noise exposures from suffering material hearing impairment even if they are subject to such noise exposures over their entire working lifetimes.

The following summarizes the required component of OSHA's hearing conservation program.^{**}[—](#)

Monitoring

The hearing conservation program requires employers to monitor noise exposure levels in a manner that will accurately identify employees who are exposed to noise at or above 85 decibels (dB)

averaged over 8 working hours, or an 8-hour time-weighted average (TWA.) That is, employers must monitor all employees whose noise exposure is equivalent to or greater than a noise exposure received in 8 hours where the noise level is constantly 85 dB. The exposure measurement must include all continuous, intermittent, and impulsive noise within an 80 dB to 130 dB range and must be taken during a typical work situation. This requirement is performance-oriented since it allows employers to choose the monitoring method that best suits each individual situation. Monitoring should be repeated when changes in production, process, or controls increase noise exposure. Such changes may mean that additional employees need to be monitored and/or their hearing protectors may no longer provide adequate attenuation.

Under this program, employees are entitled to observe monitoring procedures and they must be notified of the results of exposure monitoring. The method used to notify employees is left to the discretion of the employers.

Instruments used for monitoring employee exposures must be carefully checked or calibrated to ensure that the measurements are accurate. Calibration procedures are unique to specific instruments. Employers have the duty to ensure that the measuring instruments are properly calibrated. They may find it useful to follow the manufacturer's instruction to determine when and how extensively to calibrate.

Audiometric Testing

Audiometric testing not only monitors the sharpness and acuity of an employee's hearing over time, but also provides an opportunity for employers to educate employees about their hearing and the need to protect it.

The employer shall establish and maintain an audiometric testing program. The important elements of an audiometric testing program include baseline audiograms, annual audiograms, training, and followup procedures. Audiometric testing must be made available at no cost to all employees who are exposed to an action level of 85 dB or above, measured as an 8-hour TWA.

The audiometric testing program followup should indicate whether the employer's hearing conservation program is preventing hearing loss. A licensed or certified audiologist (specialist dealing with an individual having impaired hearing), an otolaryngologist (physician specializing in the diagnosis and treatment of disorders of the ear, nose, and throat), or a physician must be responsible for the program. Both professionals and trained technicians may conduct audiometric testing. The professional in charge of the program does not have to be present when a qualified technician conducts tests, however. The professional's responsibilities include overseeing the program and the work of the technicians, reviewing problem audiograms, and determining whether referral is necessary.

The employee needs a referral for further testing when test results are questionable or when problems of a medical nature are suspected. If additional testing is necessary or if the employer suspects a medical pathology of the ear is caused or aggravated by the wearing of hearing protectors, the employee shall be referred for a clinical audiological evaluation or otological exam, as appropriate. There are two types of audiograms required in the hearing conservation program: baseline and annual audiograms.

Baseline Audiograms

The baseline audiogram is the reference audiogram against which future audiograms are compared. Baseline audiograms must be provided within 6 months of an employee's first exposure at or above an 8-hour TWA of 85 dB. An exception is the use of mobile test vans to obtain audiograms. In these instances, baseline audiograms must be completed within 1 year after an employee's first exposure to workplace noise at or above a TWA of 85 dB. Employees, however, must be fitted with, issued, and required to wear hearing protectors for any period exceeding 6 months after their first exposure until the baseline audiogram is obtained.

Baseline audiograms taken before the effective date of the hearing conservation program (April 7, 1983) are acceptable baselines if the professional supervisor determines that the audiogram is valid. Employees should not be exposed to workplace noise for 14 hours preceding the baseline test;

however, appropriate hearing protectors can serve as a substitute for this requirement and can be worn during this time period.

Annual Audiograms

Annual audiograms must be conducted within 1 year of the baseline. It is important to test hearing on an annual basis to identify deterioration in hearing ability so that protective followup measures can be initiated before hearing loss progresses. Annual audiograms must be routinely compared to baseline audiograms to determine whether the audiogram is valid and to determine whether the employee has lost hearing ability--i.e., if a standard threshold shift (STS) has occurred. STS is an average shift in either ear of 10 dB or more at 2,000, 3,000, and 4,000 hertz. An averaging method of determining STS was chosen because it diminished the number of persons falsely identified as having STS and who are later shown not to have had a change in hearing ability. Additionally, the method is sensitive enough to identify meaningful shifts in hearing early on.

Audiogram Evaluation

If an STS is identified, employees must be fitted or refitted with adequate hearing protectors, shown how to use them, and required to wear them. Employees must be notified within 21 days from the time the determination is made that their audiometric test results showed an STS. Some employees with an STS may need to be referred for further testing if the professional determines that their test results are questionable or if they have an ear problem of a medical nature that is thought to be caused or aggravated by wearing hearing protectors. If the suspected medical problem is not thought to be related to wearing hearing protection, employees must be informed that they should see a physician. If subsequent audiometric tests show that the STS identified on a previous audiogram is not persistent, employees whose exposure to noise is less than a TWA of 90 dB may discontinue wearing hearing protectors.

An annual audiogram may be substituted for the original baseline audiogram if the professional supervising the program determines that the employee's STS is persistent. The original baseline audiogram, however, must be retained for the length of the employee's employment. This substitution will ensure that the same shift is not repeatedly identified. The professional also may decide to revise the baseline audiogram if an improvement in hearing occurs. This will ensure that the baseline reflects actual hearing thresholds to the extent possible. Audiometric tests must be conducted in a room meeting specific background levels and with calibrated audiometers that meet American National Standard Institute (ANSI) specifications of SC-1969.

Hearing Protectors

Hearing protectors must be available to all workers exposed to 8-hour TWA noise levels of 85 dB or above. This requirement will ensure that employees have access to protectors before they experience a loss in hearing. Hearing protectors must be worn by (1) employees for any period exceeding 6 months from the time they are first exposed to 8-hour TWA noise levels of 85 dB or above until they receive their baseline audiograms in situations where baseline audiograms are delayed because it is inconvenient for mobile test vans to visit the workplace more than once a year; (2) employees who have incurred standard threshold shifts since these workers have demonstrated that they are susceptible to noise; and (3) employees exposed over the permissible exposure limit of 90 dB over an 8-hour TWA.

Employees should decide, with the help of a person who is trained in fitting hearing protectors, which size and type protector is most suitable for their working environment. The protector selected should be comfortable to wear and offer sufficient attenuation to prevent hearing loss.

Hearing protectors must adequately reduce the severity of the noise level for each employee's work environment. The employer must reevaluate the suitability of the employee's present protector whenever there is a change in working conditions that may cause the hearing protector being used to be inadequate. If workplace noise levels increase, employees must be given more effective protectors. The protector must reduce employee exposures to at least 90 dB and to 85 dB when an STS already has occurred in the worker's hearing. Employees must be shown how to use and care for their protectors and must be supervised on the job to ensure that they continue to wear them correctly.

Training

Employee training is very important. When workers understand the reasons for the hearing conservation programs' requirements and the need to protect their hearing, they will be better motivated to participate actively in the program and to cooperate by wearing their protectors and taking audiometric tests. Employees exposed to TWAs of 85 dB and above must be trained at least annually in the effects of noise; the purpose, advantages, and disadvantages of various types of hearing protectors; the selection, fit, and care of protectors; and the purpose and procedures of audiometric testing. The training program may be structured in any format, with different portions conducted by different individuals and at different times, as long as the required topics are covered.

Recordkeeping

Noise exposure measurement records must be kept for 2 years. Records of audiometric test results must be maintained for the duration of employment of the affected employee. Audiometric test records must include the name and job classification of the employee, the date, the examiner's name, the date of the last acoustic or exhaustive calibration, measurements of the background sound pressure levels in audiometric test rooms, and the employee's most recent noise exposure measurement.

Other Sources of OSHA Assistance

Safety and Health Management

Effective management of worker safety and health protection is a decisive factor in reducing the extent and severity of work-related injuries and illnesses and their related costs. To assist employers and employees in developing effective safety and health programs, OSHA published recommended *Safety and Health Program Management Guidelines* (*Federal Register* 54(18):3908-3916, January 26, 1989). These voluntary guidelines apply to all places of employment covered by OSHA.

The guidelines identify four general elements that are critical to the development of a successful safety and health management program

- management commitment and employee involvement,
- worksite analysis,
- hazard prevention and control, and
- safety and health training.

The guidelines recommend specific actions under each of these general elements to achieve an effective safety and health program. A single free copy of the guidelines can be obtained from the OSHA Publications Office, P.O. Box 37535, Washington, DC 20013-7535 by sending a self-addressed mailing label with your request.

State Programs

The *Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970* encourages states to develop and operate their own job safety and health plans. States with plans approved under section 18(b) of the OSH Act must adopt standards and enforce requirements that are at least as effective as federal requirements. There are currently 25 state plan states: 23 of these states administer plans covering both private and public (state and local government) employees; the other 2 states, Connecticut and New York, cover public employees only. Plan states must adopt standards comparable to federal requirements within 6 months of a federal standard's promulgation. Until such time as a state standard is promulgated, federal OSHA provides interim enforcement assistance, as appropriate, in these states. A listing of approved state plans appears at the end of this publication.

Consultation Services

Consultation assistance is available on request to employers who want help in establishing and maintaining a safe and healthful workplace. Largely funded by OSHA, the service is provided at no cost to the employer. Primarily developed for smaller employers with more hazardous operations, the consultation service is delivered by state government agencies or universities employing professional safety consultants and health consultants. Comprehensive assistance includes an appraisal of all mechanical physical work practices and environmental hazards of the workplace and all aspects of the employer's present job safety and health program.

The program is separate from OSHA's inspection efforts. No penalties are proposed or citations issued for any safety or health problems identified by the consultant. The service is confidential.

For more information concerning consultation assistance, see the list of consultation projects at the end of this publication.

Voluntary Protection Programs

Voluntary Protection Programs (VPPs) and onsite consultation services, when coupled with an effective enforcement program, expand worker protection to help meet the goals of the OSH Act. The three VPPs--Star, Merit, and Demonstration--are designed to recognize outstanding achievement by companies that have successfully incorporated comprehensive safety and health programs into their total management system. They motivate others to achieve excellent safety and health results in the same outstanding way as they establish a cooperative relationship between employers, employees, and OSHA.

For additional information of VPPs and how to apply, contact the OSHA area or regional offices listed at the end of this publication.

Training and Education

OSHA's area offices offer a variety of informational services, such as publications, audiovisual aids, technical advice, and speakers for special engagements. OSHA's Training Institute in Des Plaines, IL, provides basic and advanced courses in safety and health for federal and state compliance officers, state consultants, federal agency personnel, and private sector employers, employees, and their representatives.

OSHA also provides funds to nonprofit organizations, through grants, to conduct workplace training and education in subjects where OSHA believes there is a lack of workplace training. Grants are awarded annually and grant recipients are expected to contribute 20 percent of the total grant cost.

For more information on grants, training, and education, contact the OSHA Training Institute, Office of Training and Education, 1555 Times Drive, Des Plaines, IL 60018, (708) 297-4810.

Emergencies

For life-threatening situations, call (800) 321-OSHA. Complaints will go immediately to the nearest OSHA area or state office for help.

Electronic Information

Labor News Bulletin Board--OSHA news releases, recent *Federal Register* notices, fact sheets, and other information are available by modem by dialing (202) 219-4784. Callers should set the modem at 300, 1,200, 2,400, 9,600, or 14,400 BAUD; Parity: None; Data Bits=8; Stop Bit=1. Voice phone: (202) 219-8831.

Internet--OSHA standards, interpretations, directives, and additional information are now on the World Wide Web at <http://www.osha.gov/> and <http://www.osha-slc.gov/>.

CD-ROM--A wide variety of OSHA materials including standards, interpretations, directives, and more can be purchased on the [OSHA CD-ROM](#) from the Government Printing Office.

OSHA FAX--OSHA news releases, fact sheets, and other short documents are available by fax for a

nominal charge of \$1.50 per minute. Callers should dial (900) 555-3400 to access this service.

For further information on any OSHA program, contact your nearest OSHA area or regional office listed at the end of this publication.

Related Publications

Single free copies of the following publications can be obtained from the OSHA Publications Office, P.O. Box 37535, Washington, DC 20013-7535. Send a self-addressed mailing label with your request.

Access to Medical and Exposure Records (OSHA 3110)

All About OSHA (OSHA 2056)

Employee Workplace Rights (OSHA 3021)

Personal Protective Equipment (OSHA 3077)

The following publications are available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402, (202) 512-1800. Include GPO Order No. and make checks payable to the Superintendent of Documents.

Ergonomics: The Study of Work (OSHA 3125) Order No. 029-016-00124-7; cost \$1.00.

Training Requirements in OSHA Standards and Training Guidelines (OSHA 2254) Order No. 029-016-00137-9; cost \$4.25.

States with Approved Plans

Commissioner

Alaska Department of Labor
1111 West 8th Street
Room 306
Juneau, AK 99801
(907) 465-2700

Director

Industrial Commission of Arizona
800 W. Washington
Phoenix, AZ 85007
(602) 542-5795

Director

California Department of Industrial Relations
455 Golden Gate Avenue
4th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94102
(415) 703-4590

Commissioner

Connecticut Department of Labor
200 Folly Brook Boulevard
Wethersfield, CT 06109
(203) 566-5123

Director

Hawaii Department of Labor and Industrial Relations
830 Punchbowl Street
Honolulu, HI 96813
(808) 586-8844

Commissioner

Indiana Department of Labor
State Office Building
402 West Washington Street
Room W195
Indianapolis, IN 46204
(317) 232-2378

Commissioner

Iowa Division of Labor Services
1000 E. Grand Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50319
(515) 281-3447

Secretary

Kentucky Labor Cabinet
1049 U.S. Highway, 127 South
Frankfort, KY 40601
(502) 564-3070

Commissioner

Maryland Division of Labor and Industry
Department of Licensing and Regulation
501 St. Paul Place, 2nd Floor
Baltimore, MD 21202-2272
(410) 333-4179

Director

Michigan Department of Labor
Victor Office Center
201 N. Washington Square
P.O. Box 30015
Lansing, MI 48933
(517) 373-9600

Director

Michigan Department of Public Health
3423 North Logan Street
Box 30195
Lansing, MI 48909
(517) 335-8022

Commissioner

Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry
443 Lafayette Road
St. Paul, MN 55155
(612) 296-2342

Administrator

Nevada Division of Industrial Relations
400 West King Street
Carson City, NV 97502
(702) 687-3032

Secretary

New Mexico Environmental Department
Occupational Health and Safety
1190 St. Francis Drive
P.O. BOX 26110
Santa Fe, NM 87502

(505) 827-2850

Commissioner

New York Department of Labor
State Office Building-12
Room 500
Albany, NY 12240
(518) 457-2741

Commissioner

North Carolina Department of Labor
319 Chapanoke Road
Raleigh, NC 27603
(919) 662-4585

Administrator

Department of Consumer and Business Services
Labor and Industries Building
350 Winter Street, NE, Room 430
Salem, OR 97310
(503) 378-3272

Secretary

Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources
Prudencio Rivera Martinez Building
505 Munoz Rivera Avenue
Hato Rey, PR 00918
(809) 754-2119

Director

South Carolina Department of Labor
Licensing and Regulation
3600 Forest Drive
P.O. Box 11329
Columbia, SC 29211-1329
(803) 734-9594

Commissioner

Tennessee Department of Labor
710 James Robertson Parkway
Suite "A" - 2nd Floor
Nashville, TN 37243-0659
(615) 741-2582

Commissioner

Industrial Commission of Utah
P.O. Box 146600
Salt Lake City, UT 84110-6600
(801) 530-6898

Commissioner

Vermont Department of Labor and Industry
National Life Bldg., Drawer 20
120 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05620
(802) 828-2288

Commissioner

Virgin Islands Department of Labor
2131 Hospital Street
Christiansted

St. Croix, VI 00820-4666
(809) 773-1994

Commissioner

Virginia Department of Labor and Industry
Powers-Taylor Building
13 South 13th Street
Richmond, VA 23219
(804) 786-2377

Director

Washington Department of Labor and Industries
General Administration Building
P.O. Box 44000
Olympia, WA 98504-4000
(360) 902-4200

Administrator

Workers Safety and Compensation Division
Herschler Building, 2nd Floor East
122 West 25th Street
Cheyenne, WY 82002
(307) 777-7672

OSHA Consultation Project Directory

State	Telephone
Alabama	(205) 348-3033
Alaska	(907) 269-4939
Arizona	(602) 542-5795
Arkansas	(501) 682-4522
California	(415) 703-4441
Colorado	(303) 491-6151
Connecticut	(203) 566-4550
Delaware	(302) 577-3908
District of Columbia	(202) 576-6339
Florida	(904) 488-3044
Georgia	(404) 894-2646
Guam	(671) 647-4202
Hawaii	(808) 586-9116
Idaho	(208) 385-3283
Illinois	(312) 814-2337
Indiana	(317) 232-2688
Iowa	(515) 281-5352
Kansas	(913) 296-4386
Kentucky	(502) 564-6895
Louisiana	(504) 342-9601

Maine	(207) 624-6460
Maryland	(410) 333-4210
Massachusetts	(617) 727-3982
Michigan	(517) 332-8250 (H) (517) 322-1809 (S)
Minnesota	(612) 297-2393
Mississippi	(601) 987-3981
Missouri	(314) 751-3403
Montana	(406) 444-6418
Nebraska	(402) 471-4717
Nevada	(702) 486-5016
New Hampshire	(603) 271-2024
New Jersey	(609) 292-3923
New Mexico	(505) 827-2877
New York	(518) 457-2481
North Carolina	(919) 662-4651
North Dakota	(701) 328-5188
Ohio	(614) 644-2631
Oklahoma	(405) 528-1500
Oregon	(503) 378-3272
Pennsylvania	(412) 357-2396
Puerto Rico	(809) 754-2171
Rhode Island	(401) 277-2438
South Carolina	(803) 734-9599
South Dakota	(605) 688-4101
Tennessee	(615) 741-7036
Texas	(512) 440-3834
Utah	(801) 530-6868
Vermont	(802) 828-2765
Virginia	(804) 786-8707
Virgin Islands	(809) 772-1315
Washington	(360) 902-5507
West Virginia	(304) 558-7890
Wisconsin	(608) 266-8579 (H) (414) 521-5188 (S)
Wyoming	(307) 777-7786

(H) - Health
(S) - Safety

OSHA Area Offices

Area	Telephone
Albany, NY	(518) 464-6742
Albuquerque, NM	(505) 766-3411
Allentown, PA	(215) 776-0592
Anchorage, AK	(907) 271-5152
Appleton, WI	(414) 734-4521
Augusta, MA	(207) 622-8417
Austin, TX	(512) 482-5783
Avenel, NJ	(908) 750-3270
Baltimore, MD	(410) 962-2840
Baton Rouge, LA	(504) 389-0474
Bayside, NY	(718) 279-9060
Bellevue, WA	(206) 553-7520
Billings, MT	(406) 657-6649
Birmingham, AL	(205) 731-1534
Bismarck, ND	(701) 250-4521
Boise, ID	(208) 334-1867
Bowmansville, NY	(716) 684-3891
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Des Moines, IA	(515) 284-4794

Englewood, CO	(303) 843-4500
Erie, PA	(814) 833-5758
Fort Lauderdale, FL	(305) 424-0242
Fort Worth, TX	(817) 885-7025
Frankfort, KY	(502) 227-7024
Harrisburg, PA	(717) 782-3902
Hartford, CT	(203) 240-3152
Hasbrouck Heights, NJ	(201) 288-1700
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Houston, TX	(713) 591-2438
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Jacksonville, FL	(904) 232-2895
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Marlton, NJ	(609) 757-5181
Methuen, MA	(617) 565-8110
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North Aurora, IL	(708) 896-8700
Oklahoma City, OK	(405) 231-5351
Omaha, NE	(402) 221-3182
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Pittsburgh, PA	(412) 644-2903
Portland, OR	(503) 326-2251

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Tampa, FL	(813) 626-1177
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Westbury, NY	(516) 334-3344
Wichita, KS	(316) 269-6644
Wilkes-Barre, PA	(717) 826-6538

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Occupational Safety and Health Administration
Regional Offices

Region I

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New York, NY 10014
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Room 3244

Chicago, IL 60604

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Room 602

Dallas, TX 75202

Telephone: (214) 767-4731

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Kansas City, MO 64105

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Suite 715

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Footnote* These states and territories operate their own OSHA-approved job safety and health programs (Connecticut and New York plans cover public employees only). States with approved programs must have a standard that is identical to, or at least as effective as, the federal standard.

[Footnote**](#) See Title 29 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1910.95 "Occupational Noise Exposure."
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